

Senator Margarita Prentice

Summer 2003

Dear Friends,

The 2003 legislative session is likely to be remembered as one of the toughest sessions on record. Legislators faced a more than \$2.6 billion deficit, and this was no time to raise taxes. Very difficult decisions would have to be made.

In the end, the Senate and House of Representatives met right in the middle. The most troublesome cuts were restored without new taxes. This newsletter contains some of the highlights that directly impact our district.

Feel free to contact me on these or other issues of interest. Your comments and concerns are essential to my representing our district and I appreciate hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Margarita Prentice

Margarita Prentice
State Senator, 11th District

P.S.

My sincere thanks for the many prayers and words of encouragement sent because of the passing of my husband, Bill. He loved the 11th District and would have been very proud and touched by these messages.

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To subscribe to my informal intermittent update, send your request to my e-mail address: prentice_ma@leg.wa.gov or call my office direct at (360) 786-7616.



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Sen. Margarita Prentice represents the 11th Legislative District. She is the ranking Democrat on the Financial Services, Insurance & Housing Committee and also serves on the Highways & Transportation Committee.

Transportation

The 10-year, \$4.2 billion new revenue budget includes a one-time 5-cent increase in the state gas tax, a 15 percent gross-weight fee increase for commercial trucks and a 0.3 percent sales tax on motor vehicles. All three take effect July 1, and the resulting revenue is tied to a specific list of projects.

New projects in our district include:

- Interstate 405/West Valley Highway to Maple Valley

Highway – \$1.4 million to construct an additional lane approaching the I-405/state Route 167 interchange northbound from SR 181 to SR 167 and southbound from SR 169 to SR 167;

- SR 509 design and acquisition of right of way – \$35 million to complete this project; and
- SR 167/corridor study – \$9.6 million to complete environmental documentation for the SR 167 corridor between Renton and Puyallup.

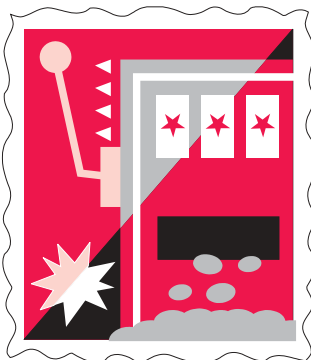


Gambling

One of the biggest issues this session was the expansion of gambling as possible budget-balancing revenue. One proposal would have allowed an additional 19,000 video lottery terminals (VLT – basically, fake slot machines) in

bars, restaurants, card rooms and bowling alleys throughout the state. The other proposal would have increased keno drawings to every four minutes, or about 300 times a day, rather than the current drawing of once a day.

The Entertainment Industry Coalition (EIC) promoted the slot machine proposal as a “fairness” issue — they said the tribes have a monopoly because tribes are the only group in the state allowed to operate slots. That “monopoly,” they claim, means less money for them. Not only do they want more games, but they also continue to expand their existing franchises into other locations. This proliferation was not the intent of the 1997 Legislature, which authorized House-banked card games in our communities.



After yet another outrageous EIC proposal promising increased state revenue dollars, I introduced a bill (SB 6078) that would have prohibited the State Gambling Commission from accepting any new card room applications. Even though

the bill didn’t progress, it certainly got the attention of this industry and will set the stage for serious consideration next session.

Budget

The budget agreed on by the Legislature is far from perfect, but it does **not raise** taxes. At the same time, it preserves vital state services that were drastically cut or eliminated in earlier versions of the budget.

- **No one** will be eliminated from the Basic Health Plan — as was first proposed — the state’s low-cost health insurance for working poor.
- Medical assistance for 40,000 children in low-income families is maintained.

- Undocumented mothers will have prenatal care for their children, who are born as U.S. citizens. This is strictly a health matter — not a racial one.
- Developmental disabilities and mental health programs were maintained.

Ironically, the initiatives approved by the voters are basically unfunded mandates. The writers of the initiatives didn’t provide funding sources. However, the final budget provided increased K-12 education funds, and teachers in their first seven years in the classroom will receive raises. Home health care workers received a small pay increase but no healthcare benefits. Some may disagree with this approach, but these were some of the toughest decisions we had to make.

Capital budget

The capital budget re-invests funds into the state, which creates jobs and improves schools, arts programs, natural resources and public safety. Our 11th District will benefit from funding for the following projects:

- **Museum of Flight** – \$500,000 to go toward the construction of a new wing connected to the cur-

rent complex at King County International Airport. The project will include a plaza-level space for the museum archives, library and collections, and eventually for a National Center Air and Space History.

- **Duwamish Tribal Services** – \$350,000 for the construction of a 9,000 square-foot Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center.
- **Artspace, Tashiro Kaplan Artist Housing Project** – \$300,000 to go toward the rehabilitation and expansion of Pioneer Square's Tashiro and Kaplan buildings. These two buildings will total 105,000 square feet of leasable space for the arts, including low-income housing for artists and their families.
- **Grandmother's Hill** – \$300,000 toward joint purchase of this area with historic significance to the Duwamish tribe and site of million year old Marine fossils. Included is nearly a ¼-mile of river bank connected to a major thoroughfare and accessible to cyclists, walkers and passers-by.
- **Georgetown Community Council** – \$50,000 to restore the historic "Hat n' Boots" structures and move them to Oxbow Park in Georgetown. The larger-than-life size cowboy hat and boot were identified by the community as the most desired elements of the new park.
- **South Seattle Community College** – \$17,236,600 for construction of the Instructional Technology Center and \$2,613,100 for renovation of the pastry vocational program structure.

Special session: Boeing

The governor called a special session to address the nationwide bidding war for the construction site of Boeing's new 7E7 aircraft. Everett and Moses Lake are the most attractive locations because of the existing and potential infrastructure available and needed by



Boeing. I was on the committee that drafted our state's proposal for this project. Other members

included the Governor, representatives from Boeing, the Department of Trade & Economic Development, union leaders and eight legislators. By reducing Boeing's business tax rate — effective **only** if the 7E7 is built here — the Legislature gave Washington a high competitive edge. This sacrifice in tax revenue could help ensure thousands of high-paying jobs and the future economic vitality of our state.

Unemployment insurance

Washington has had one of the most generous unemployment insurance systems in the nation. This has been at the cost of big industry, big retailers and restaurants subsidizing unemployment for seasonal industries. The 2002 Legislature passed HB 2901 as an attempt at UI reform. But a significant portion of the business community disagreed with the bill and collected enough signatures to get Referendum 53 — repealing HB 2901 — on the ballot. And the voters supported the Referendum. UI reform became even more urgent to be competitive for the 7E7 assembly site. The final bill that passed was another tough decision. It will attract more businesses but will also reduce benefits for some of the most poor workers.



Prescription drugs

The cost of prescription drugs is rising at double-digit rates. Fortunately, this session, we were finally able to reach an agreement on how to make prescription drugs more affordable. We passed a bill that:

- Creates a state-purchasing consortium that will enable state agencies that purchase drugs to identify preferred drugs and negotiate lower prices with drug companies;
- Develops a discount program for the disabled and people 50 or older who have incomes of less than \$36,000 (for a family of two);
- Directs Medicaid to seek a federal waiver as a first step toward creating a Medicaid-subsidized prescription drug program;
- Creates a pharmacy connection program that will help low-income people obtain no-cost or low-cost drugs; and
- Requires the state's Area Agencies on Aging to develop programs to educate seniors about how to safely use prescriptions.

More than 200,000 people in Washington do not have prescription drug coverage and meet the income and age guidelines for the discount program.

Interim activities

I have been reappointed as an ex-officio member of the Gambling Commission, which meets every other month. I've also been asked to be on the Legislative Transportation Committee Executive Committee. As a member of the Financial Services, Insurance & Housing Committee, I will be a part of work sessions in three different locations of the state to review housing needs and resources for the surrounding communities.

Pages

It is always a pleasure to have students from our local schools serve as Senate pages. They are in Olympia for a week working within the Legislature. A student must be 14 years old but not yet 17 by the time he or she pages. Applications are accepted on a first come first served basis and are available through my office or online at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/senate/sadm/senpage.htm> on the Internet.



Ryan Button with Sen. Prentice



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Dates